

Week 11/14-20/93

## 'FATAL DECEPTION'

PAGE 7

# A New Portrait of JFK's Assassin

By Patricia Brennan

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**W**hat kind of person was Lee Harvey Oswald? Even his Russian-born widow, Marina, who buried him on the day of John F. Kennedy's state funeral, was uncertain about what had been going on in his life.

Monday at 9, NBC's "Fatal Deception: Mrs. Lee Harvey Oswald" recounts the love story of Marina and Lee Harvey Oswald and their life together in Russia and in Texas, where they settled a year after their marriage.

The dramatization, based on Marina Oswald Porter's recollections, is one of several productions airing this week and next as the 30th anniversary of President Kennedy's death approaches on Nov. 22. On Tuesday, PBS's "Frontline" also takes a look at Oswald in a three-hour documentary at 9.

Arrested by Dallas police for killing Kennedy and Dallas Police Officer J.D. Tippit and wounding then-Texas Gov. John Connally, Oswald, 24, was for a long moment in 1963 the most hated man in the nation. But when Jack Ruby, a Dallas nightclub owner, shot and killed him before he was arraigned for Kennedy's murder, Oswald took with him the answer to a grieving country's still unanswered question: Why?

"Fatal Deception" does not provide the answer, but it does offer a more personal view of the man thought to be the lone assassin.

British actress Helena Bonham Carter, 27, takes the role of Marina and Frank Whaley, 30, plays Oswald. In one of those incidental twists that continue to make the Kennedy case fascinating, Whaley appeared, uncredited, in Oliver Stone's "JFK" as an Oswald impersonator. Gary Oldman played Oswald.

Whaley's film career includes "Ironweed," "Field of Dreams," "Hoffa," "Born on the Fourth of July," "A Midnight Clear" and "Swing Kids." But after this week he may be remembered as the man who played Lee Harvey Oswald.

Born in July 1963, before Kennedy was killed in November, Whaley had grown up in Syracuse, N.Y., noticing that "each year around this time, people were always discussing it. My father worked in the school system, and he told me how they closed school and didn't go back for a couple of days."

He viewed the role as one he could not turn down.

"I became kind of fascinated with it when I was doing 'The Doors' with Oliver Stone," he said. "He first mentioned the whole 'JFK' project, and he made innuendos [about a possible role for Whaley], so I started doing some research. I read 'Spy Saga' about the conspiracy theory. It was fascinating to me. I was so disappointed when the role [of Oswald] went to Gary Oldman, but he was brilliant. But then this one came along, so I had to jump at it. I had done all this research anyhow."

Still, he has reservations about Stone's conspiracy theory.

"I believe he was involved in some way [in the assassination]—I don't think there's any doubt about that—but there's no way he could have been involved alone. It's all such a web it's almost impossible to get at. The only way we'd ever know was if he was never shot. Jack Ruby was more or less a pawn in the network. The fact is, we'll never know."

Oswald had been a U.S. Marine stationed in Japan before he defected to the Soviet Union. Whaley thinks "he was a very smart guy. He learned a little [Russian] in the Marines and he had a coach in Russia. It's a very difficult language to learn, and he spoke it almost without accent. We can only guess why he was there. We only know there are many mysterious facts surrounding Lee Harvey Oswald."

One of them involves an earlier assassination attempt on Maj. Gen. Edwin A. Walker, an ultraconservative anticommunist who lived in Dallas, just seven months before President Kennedy was

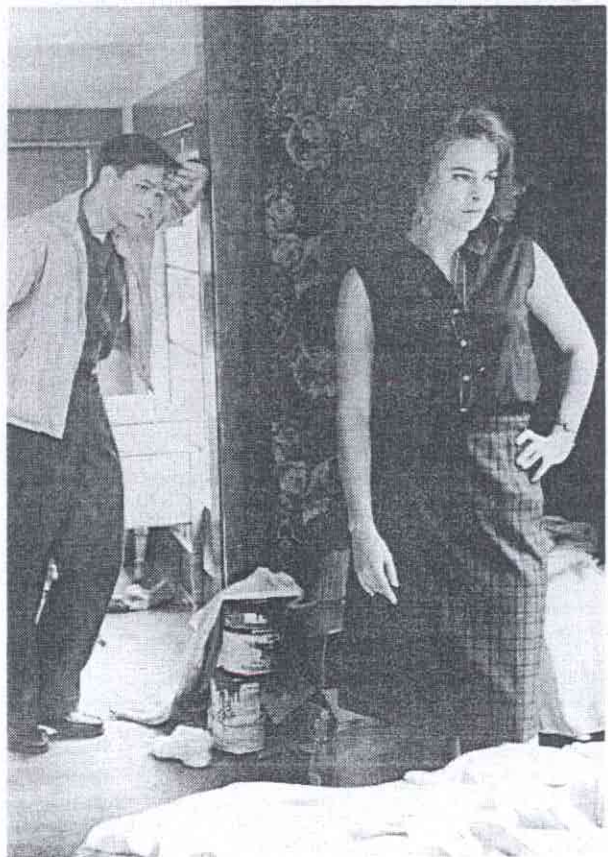
killed. In 1961, Walker had quit the Army after being admonished for giving his troops John Birch Society literature implying that President Kennedy was a traitor. In 1962, he ran for governor of Texas, a race he lost to Connally. The Warren Commission later declared Oswald had been the gunman whose shot through a window of Walker's home barely missed the retired general. Two weeks ago, Walker died at age 84.

In NBC's film, Oswald admits to Marina that he attempted to shoot Walker. But the movie does not picture that shooting nor does it dramatize the shooting of John F. Kennedy or visit the Texas School Book Depository where Oswald is thought to have shot the president from the sixth floor, now a museum.

Instead, viewers watch events of that day on television with Marina Oswald and stay with her as the Dallas police rush into her house to search for Lee's gun, which turns up missing. She is taken to the Dallas county jail where her husband is being held and talks with him over a prison telephone, a grilled window between them. He tells her that he is not guilty, that she should not believe "all the so-called evidence against me," and that she should give their daughters a kiss for him. It is the last time she will see him alive.

Whaley went to Lee Harvey Oswald's jail cell and spent some time there when "JFK" was being filmed.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 52



BY ALICE S. HALL

Frank Whaley and Helena Bonham Carter as Lee and Marina Oswald.



## 'FATAL DECEPTION'

WHALEY FROM PAGE 7

"That scene was the sole reason I decided to take the part. When they called me to do the part, 'JFK' was out and I didn't want to rehash political theories, conspiracy theories. I didn't think that anyone could do it any better than Oliver Stone did.

"But there hasn't really been a good picture about Lee Harvey Oswald, the man. I saw this scene as so definitive of Lee. From what Marina said, he was a very compassionate man. He loved his wife, his daughters."

But according to Marina Oswald, Lee also could be harsh, and so disliked her chain-smoking that he would "put her cigarette butt out on her skin," said Whaley. The actor concluded that Oswald was "a very disturbed man, cruel, very abusive emotionally and physically. Things had to be neat and orderly and organized. And he was incredibly jealous. One assassination theory is that [Oswald acted after his wife said] Kennedy was good-looking. I wanted to get at his personal characteristics."

Whaley could have used Marina's help in constructing his portrayal, but he said she initially did not want to meet him.

"It was a very difficult task for me to play this part," said Whaley. "Gary Oldman in 'JFK' physically captured Oswald. I decided not to do that. I decided to almost invent the character of Lee from what I'd read. It was a matter of guesswork."

Eventually Marina Oswald Porter invited the cast, writers and producers to the 17-acre farm outside Dallas that she shares with her husband Kenneth, a carpenter she married in 1965.

When the cast and crew went to Moscow in August 1992 to film, Marina returned to Russia for the first time since she left in May 1962. She had been a pharmacy student, an orphan, living in Minsk with her aunt and uncle when she met Oswald, known as Alik, and married him six weeks later.

Whaley said he was sitting in a hotel lobby there when she encountered him. "She said, 'You don't look anything like Lee. Lee had much bigger bones and you're too good-looking.' Lee was about 5-8 and about 140 pounds, about the same as me."

Later, he said, Marina would contradict her earlier remark and tell him, "You look just like my Lee."

Whaley said: "I don't think she can recall. This has been 30 years ago. There are things she can remember like they were yesterday, but she contradicted herself so much about him, just with me. One minute she would say he was a loving, caring, compassionate guy, and the next she would say he was a monster."

Marina Oswald was only 22 when she appeared before the Warren Commission investigating Kennedy's death and was presented with evidence that she took to be true. She agreed that he must have been the lone assassin, but has said recently that she felt coerced and believed what the U.S. government told her. In the film, Marina says, "I dread November—it all comes back."

Today, Marina Oswald Porter is 52, mother of Oswald's two daughters and a son by Porter, and a grandmother of five. Because Oswald never went to trial for or was convicted of the deaths of Kennedy and Tippit or the wounding of Connally, she said in August on NBC's "Now With Tom Brokaw and Katie Couric" that she would like President Clinton to pardon him.